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**Former Midland Red Bus Depot Site, Stafford:
an archaeological desk-based assessment**

by
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Summary

A desk-based assessment was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in October 2002 in advance of submission of a planning application for proposed development by ADW Partnership on behalf of AIP Ltd. on the site of the former Midland Red Bus Depot in Stafford (centred on NGR 392208/322967). The assessment examined the available documentary and cartographic evidence and identified any areas of potential archaeological interest. A site inspection was also made. It was concluded that due to the location of the site just outside the former town walls of Stafford and adjacent to the River Sow, and because certain areas of the site have not been subject to much previous ground disturbance, there may be the potential for the survival of medieval and/or post-medieval remains, perhaps relating to industries such as tanning.

1.0 Introduction

This archaeological desk-based assessment has been prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in advance of submission of a planning application for proposed A3 development by ADW Partnership on behalf of AIP Ltd. The development proposal involves the construction of a number of large buildings to cover the site formerly comprising the Midland Red Bus Depot in Stafford (centred on NGR 392208/322967; Fig. 1), and an area of residential car-park to their west. The development proposals also involve the construction of a pedestrian bridge across the River Sow, providing access to the site from Mill Bank. The location of the site, hereafter referred to as the study area, is shown on Fig. 2. The aim of the report is to provide a summary of known and potential archaeological information for the study area, based on existing data, in order to enable appropriate archaeological mitigation strategies to be devised. The assessment adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

2.0 Location of Study Area

The study area is located immediately south of the River Sow to the south of the medieval town of Stafford, in the suburb of Forebridge. It is bordered by the River Sow to the north and west, Pilgrim Place and Epsley's Yard to the south (including a spur to the south encompassing Pilgrim Street), and buildings to the east, including The Picture House public house (Fig. 2). The study area sits within the northwest corner of a block of land defined by the River Sow, Newport Road and Bridge Street. The Green Bridge over the Sow lies at the northeast corner of this block. The site of the Green Gate into the town of Stafford also lies just to the northeast on Mill Bank.

3.0 Objectives

The objective of this assessment was to determine the likely survival and significance of archaeological remains within and around the proposed development site, in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate. The desk-based assessment was intended to identify the need for any further archaeological work in

advance of a planning decision, and to identify potential requirements for any *in situ* preservation of archaeological remains, or for their recording in advance of, or during, development. Final mitigation decisions, however, rest with Staffordshire County Council.

4.0 Method

A site inspection of the study area was carried out and documentary research was undertaken of primary and secondary records and maps held by Staffordshire County Record Office, the William Salt Library in Stafford, and the University of Birmingham Library. Stafford Borough Sites and Monuments Record was consulted. All sources consulted during the assessment are listed in Section 12.0 below.

5.0 Geology and Topography

The Hopton Fault runs north-south two miles to the east of Stafford. Forebridge is on the 'downthrow' side of the fault, where there are deep deposits of marl of the Stafford Halite formation. In the area of the Wolverhampton Road are thick beds of alluvial soil standing on the marl bedrock. Narrow mounds of alluvium exist from The Green towards St. Leonard's Avenue (Imm 1994).

6.0 Site Visit

A brief site visit was made in order to determine current land-use and conditions, and to identify any buildings or features of historical or archaeological interest. A number of colour photographs were taken, some of which have been included in this report (Plates 1-3).

The majority of the study area is currently in use as a private car park and works base (Plates 1-2) for Environment Agency works along the south bank of the River Sow as part of improvements to the river's flow. The ground within the study area appears fairly flat, is mostly covered with tarmac or hardstanding, and is on considerably higher ground than the level of the river water. It is revetted against the river with a modern brick wall. The study area is currently bordered temporarily by Heras fencing in the south as part of the ongoing works. The eastern edge is bordered by a high brick wall, separating it from buildings fronting Bridge Street. The rest of the study area is bordered by a modern brick wall between it and the river. The area at the time of the visit contained cars, works plant and Portakabin structures, thereby making it fairly inaccessible. No features of archaeological or historical interest were observed. Pilgrim Street (Plate 3) is currently a one-way road. On its eastern side is an electricity sub-station, an area of open, surfaced ground used for waste bins and car-parking and a building of probable 19th-century date at the corner with Newport Road. To the west of Pilgrim Street there is a three-storey 19th-century building fronting onto Newport Road. It has been extended to its rear with modern buildings.

7.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

7.1 Prehistoric

Mesolithic flint tools dating from 5000BC have been found in the town of Stafford, and a possible Iron Age causeway was found at Queensway in 1976, but no prehistoric archaeology is recorded for the study area itself.

7.2 Roman

Several small sherds of pottery dating from the Romano-British period have been found within the old walled area of Stafford, but nothing has been found which might indicate the presence of a Roman settlement in the town. A Roman coin of Faustina Junior (SMR 2196) was found in Forebridge. The nearest known Roman settlement to Stafford was that at Penkridge, to the south. No Roman sites or finds are recorded within the study area.

7.3 Anglo-Saxon

In AD 913, Stafford was founded as a *burh* (SMR 00765) by Aethelflaed, and developed into a commercial centre with a mint (AD. 924-1189), market and pottery manufacturing industry (Wilkinson 2002). It became the county town in the 11th century. The Domesday Book of 1086 records Stafford as being walled in timber. However, it does not mention the existence of a settlement to the south of Stafford's defences, which is where the study area is situated. During the 7th century, there was a settlement on a well-drained promontory of sand and gravel on the north side of the River Sow (Imm 1994). In Saxon and early Norman times, the River Sow was crossed by a ford. A road leading southwards out of Stafford was first mentioned about 1200. This is perhaps likely to have been in the vicinity of Bridge Street, which lies to the east of the study area.

7.4 Medieval

The medieval town of Stafford (SMR 00765) developed on the site of the burh, which was founded by Aethelflaed in 913. The Domesday Book records a borough and burgesses and, in 1206, a royal charter granted a free borough. From the late medieval period, suburbs developed to the north and south of the Domesday settlement nucleus. At some date in the medieval period the walls of Stafford were extended to encompass these settled areas, and were constructed in stone (Wilkinson 2002). At the south of the town, the walls ran along the northern bank of the River Sow, as shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1902, which marks them as running along Mill Bank to the north of the study area. This means that the study area itself lies outside the walled town of Stafford in the area known as Forebridge.

Forebridge was originally part of the parish of Castle Church, which was separated from Stafford by at least 1546. The name Forebridge is presumably intended to reflect its location in front of the bridge into Stafford. Three main roads crossed the parish and met near the Green Bridge over the River Sow, just to the northeast of the study area; these roads are Newport Road, Lichfield Road, and Wolverhampton Road.

Forebridge has been so-called since 1288, and is the area of land immediately south of the Green Bridge. The settlement first developed around The Green, first mentioned in 1304, a knoll of ground which was slightly higher and drier than the surrounding

marshy land. The green lies to the southeast of the study area. By 1327, it was a separate vill with nine inhabitants. The Green contained most of the population of the parish in 1403. The Hospitals of St. John and St. Leonard, and the house of Austin Friars were all situated at Forebridge. An archaeological desk-based assessment (Watt 2000) and field evaluation (Coates and Duncan 2001) were carried out by BUFAU on a site at The Green. Although the desk-based assessment identified the possibility for survival of remains of the Austin Friary, the evaluation found no direct evidence for its presence. Generally, the finds attested activity on the site from the 12th century onwards, but there were no archaeological features to enable the nature of this activity to be characterised. Enclosure was taking place in Castle Church from the late 14th century. In 1543, the only surviving common field in Forebridge was the Green Field, which lay between the road from Stafford to Radford Bridge and the Wolverhampton Road.

7.5 Post-medieval

The study area and its surroundings may have been deliberately cleared of buildings during the Civil War. In 1642 the occupants of The Green, in Forebridge, were ordered to pull down all buildings within musket shot of the town's walls by the Parliamentary Committee at Stafford (Wilkinson 2002), and the study area is certainly situated within such a range. In 1680, most of the parish's population was still living around The Green, where there were about 30 or 40 houses. A map of 1788 shows the area between Newport Road and the river (including the study area) as being devoid of buildings, which may have been due to the ordered clearance of buildings during the Civil War in 1642 (Wilkinson 2002).

An act for draining and enclosing Forebridge was passed in 1800 and the Award made in 1851. Under this, a network of drains into the Sow was built, the first of these running through Broad Meadow to The Green. The Broad Meadow Drain ran across the area directly to the south of the study area, crossing Pilgrim Street. By 1851, the Green Field and Green Common remained unenclosed. When it was enclosed, five acres on the Lichfield Road were allotted to the Castle Church parishioners and became known as the Green Common. Forebridge saw extensive housing development from 1840 onwards.

It is recorded that from 1164-5 the burgesses of Stafford held of the king a mill on the Sow to the southwest of the town centre. In 1173 it passed into the possession of Robert de Stafford and remained in the hands of the Stafford family until 1879. This is the site of the corn mill which is depicted to the northwest of the study area on the historic maps from at least 1800. In the 19th century, complaints about flooding caused by the damming of the river at the mill led to the construction of a weir and floodgates. These features can be seen on the 1882 Ordnance Survey map. The last structure to grind corn on the site was constructed in 1834 by George Brewster and was demolished in 1957. The mill site was then laid out as an extension to Victoria Park, with two undershot wheels left in position (Wilkinson 2002).

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by BUFAU (Martin forthcoming) during test-pitting along the line of a culvert running from a landscape pool in Victoria Park, through the disused water mill in Mill Bank and into the River Sow to the east of the mill. Although it was considered possible that the site would contain evidence relating to the 19th-century mill, as well as having the potential for

providing evidence of earlier phases of activity, no features or deposits of archaeological significance were encountered and may have been removed by later activity.

An archaeological watching brief has been carried out by BUFAU (Martin forthcoming) during excavations for the anchoring of sheet piling along the south bank of the River Sow adjacent to Epsley's Yard. A watching brief was required as it was considered possible that this area could contain archaeological deposits relating to medieval, early post-medieval and 19th-century settlement activity. The watching brief found up to 2m of landscaping/overburden, but no archaeological deposits.

8.0 Cartographic Information

c.1610 Speed's Map of Stafford (Fig. 3)

This highly-stylised non-detailed plan of the walled town does show the Green Gate (then South Gate) and the Green Bridge over the Sow. It also shows some buildings fronting onto Bridge Street and at its corner with Newport Street. These, however, would probably have been just outside the study area.

1732 Richard Drakeford's Estate in Forebridge and Baswich (Fig.4)

It is not clear where the study area is situated on this map. However, Broad Meadow is shown at a bend in the River Sow, and given that the 1851 Enclosure map shows a Broad Meadow Drain running to the south of the study area, this may represent the area of land covered by the study area.

1775 Yates's Map of Staffordshire (Fig.5)

This map again is small-scale and does not show any detail of the study area, although buildings are shown in the Forebridge area to the southeast of it.

c.1800 Map of Several Estates belonging to Sir William Jerningham in the...Manor of Forebridge (Fig. 6)

This map shows the block of land in which the study area is situated to have been divided roughly in half by irregular curving boundaries, possibly representing drainage channels, as they appear to join the River Sow. The northern part of the block, containing most of the study area, was occupied by Richard Smith, and the southern part by J.L. Parker. One of the drainage channels runs in the approximate location of the present Epsley's Yard and Pilgrim Place. A building is shown across the Sow from the study area, outside its northwestern corner. To the west of this building, shown on later maps to be a mill, there is an area of water management where the Sow appears to have been diverted to form a loop to the south. No buildings are shown within the study area itself.

c.1830 Map of Castlechurch Parish (Fig. 7)

The main difference between this map and the 1800 map is the depiction of several buildings in the southeastern corner of the block containing the study area, probably just outside it, although the westernmost one may be within it.

Undated 19th-century Plan of Meadows and Lowlands Situate on the Rivers Sow and Penk in the Parish of Castlechurch....property of Sir William Jerningham (Fig. 8)

This map presents a similar depiction to the previous two, although a wider drain is shown running adjacent to Newport Street.

1851 Forebridge Drainage and Enclosure Award and Map (Fig. 9)

Two buildings are shown fronting onto Bridge Street. The drain running adjacent to Newport Street is labeled Broad Meadow Drain. The building across the Sow to the northwest is identified as Stafford Mill.

1875 Description and Plan of Forebridge (Fig. 10)

This map appears to be more of a sketch plan than an accurate survey. Again the only buildings shown are on the Bridge Street/Newport Street frontage.

1882 First Edition Ordnance Survey Map (Fig. 11)

This map shows the study area to be quite densely built-up with various uses represented. To the west of Pilgrim Street, which, at that time, ran straight through from Newport Street to the River Sow, was a timber yard. Epsley's Yard is shown as an accessway running north rather than turning to the east as it does now. A row of terraces fronted onto it, backing onto the river. Two larger buildings lay in the timber yard and a third, very large building lay against the river to the north. These buildings stood opposite the area of Stafford corn mill, and may perhaps have been used for transportation of timber down the river. There was a further terrace fronting onto Pilgrim Street and the northern edge of a skating rink off Newport Road lay within the study area as well. To the east of Pilgrim Street, and north of Pilgrim Place, stood terraced housing - a property boundary cutting off the eastern end of Pilgrim Place (and defining the eastern edge of the study area) separated the housing from what appears to have been an area of yards or gardens containing open-sided buildings, and an orchard. To the south and east of Pilgrim Place, also outside the study area, were larger terraces fronting onto Newport Road and extending back from Bridge Street, with associated yard or court areas.

1902 Second Edition Ordnance Survey Map (Fig. 12)

Epsley's Yard and the timber yard (no longer marked as such) were by this time part of the same open space - the larger buildings in the northwestern corner of the study area had been removed. Other property boundaries within the study area had been retained. The orchard, just outside it to the east had been replaced by buildings and yards.

1923 Third Edition Ordnance Survey Map (Fig. 13)

By this time, Epsley's Yard was in its current location, although it remained unnamed. The area of the timber yard to the north of it now contained a large garage building. The area of the former skating rink contained a Drill Hall and a further garage building. East of Pilgrim Street still retained terraces, although the land to the east contained a Picture Theatre, now The Picture House public house. The Stafford corn mill was still in use to the west.

9.0 Conclusion

Given the importance of the study area's location just outside the gates of the old walled town of Stafford and beside a marked bend in the River Sow, there is a possibility that archaeological remains relating to early industries which required

large amounts of water, such as tanning, have survived. The 'suburb' of Forebridge was founded in the medieval period when these sorts of industries would have been operating. Industries like tanning, which create noxious smells, would ideally have been sited outside the town adjacent to the river. Survival of such deposits may be particularly good in the northwestern part of the study area, which does not appear to have seen much later disturbance until the construction of a garage in the early 20th century (between 1902 and 1923). The area at the eastern edge of the study area has also seen little disturbance, as it was in use as yards for the 19th-century terraces fronting Pilgrim Street. The area formerly occupied by the terraces may have been disturbed by cellaring and building foundations, although evidence from areas of Birmingham City Centre would suggest that medieval and post-medieval remains can survive as 'islands' of deposits between such disturbed areas. The area across the River Sow, which would be affected by the construction of a pedestrian bridge, also contained only yard areas associated with terraced housing in the 19th century.

10.0 Provisional Recommendations

Some provisional recommendations are made here for further archaeological recording or investigation to be carried out ahead of development works on the site. These recommendations are made on the basis of the results of this assessment, and are subject to approval by the Staffordshire County Archaeologist.

It may be considered appropriate to maintain a watching brief by an appropriately qualified archaeologist on the site during groundworks. Observations from the watching brief already carried out on the site adjacent to the study area indicated the presence of a considerable degree of overburden, which may also be present on the current study area. Archaeological evaluation of such an area may thus present difficulties. Such a depth of overburden may also preserve any archaeological features, although this is dependent on the nature of development. If development plans are intended to increase levels across the study area, any archaeological deposits may be preserved *in situ*. Details of the development plans regarding the depth of below-ground intrusions by foundations, etc., would require to be known before full recommendations could be made. It is not known whether any of the development proposals will affect buildings on Pilgrim Street.

11.0 Acknowledgements

This report was written by Sarah Watt and edited by Gary Coates. The figures were prepared by Nigel Dodds. Thanks are due to David Wilkinson of the Stafford Borough Sites and Monuments Record and to the staff of the County Record Office.

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Maps

Ordnance Survey

1882 First Edition 25" Sheet 37.11

1901 Second Edition 25" Sheets 37.11

1923 Third Edition 25" Sheets 37.11

Others

c.1610 Speed's Map of Stafford

1732 Richard Drakeford's Estate in Forebridge and Baswich

1775 Yates's Map of Staffordshire

c.1800 Map of Several Estates belonging to Sir William Jerningham in the...Manor of Forebridge

c.1830 Map of Castlechurch Parish

1851 Forebridge Drainage and Enclosure Award and Map (Map 11)

1875 Description and Plan of Forebridge

19th century Plan of the Meadows and Lowlands Situate on the Rivers Sow and Penk in the parish of Castlechurch...property of Sir William Jerningham

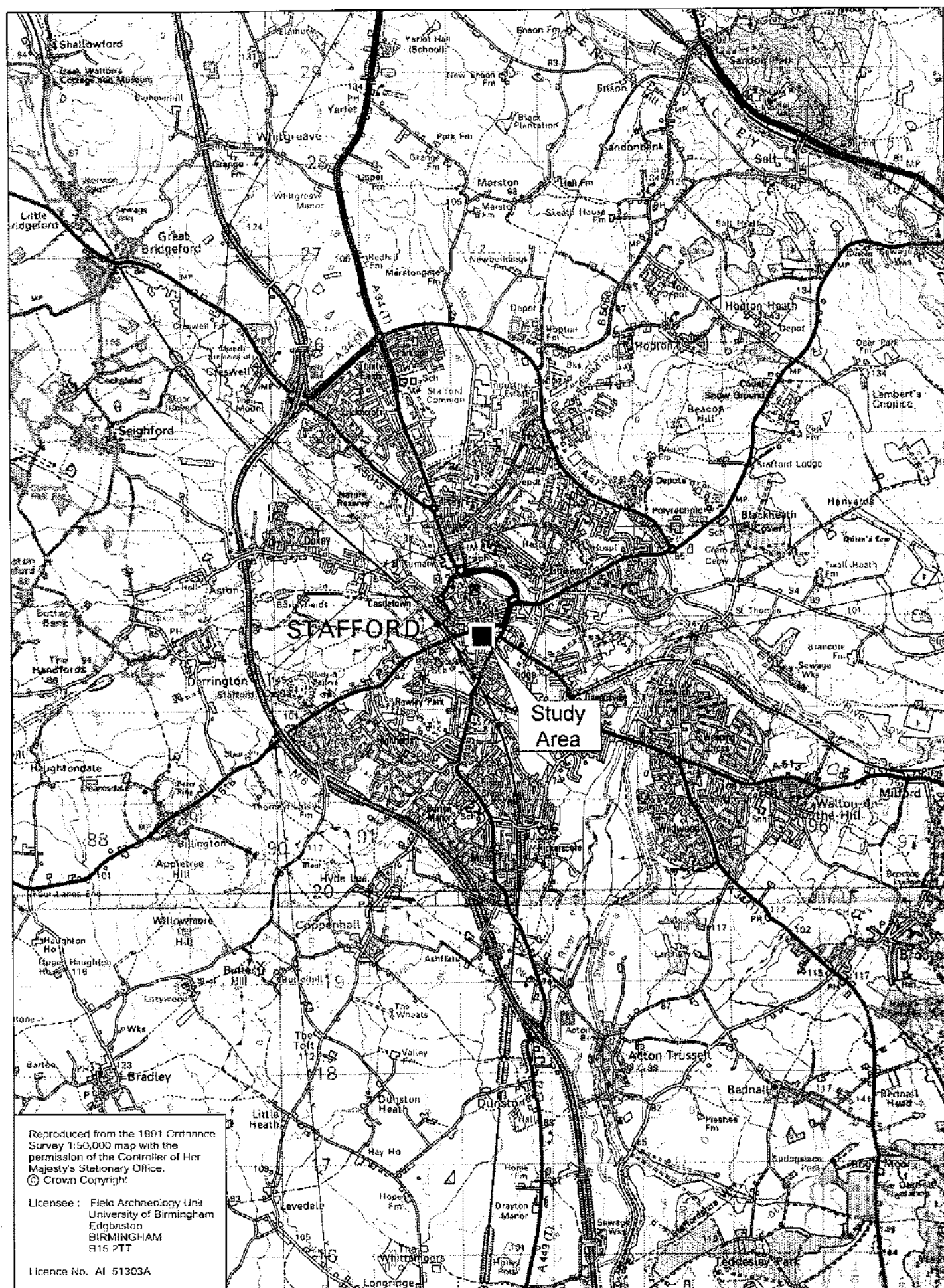


Fig.1

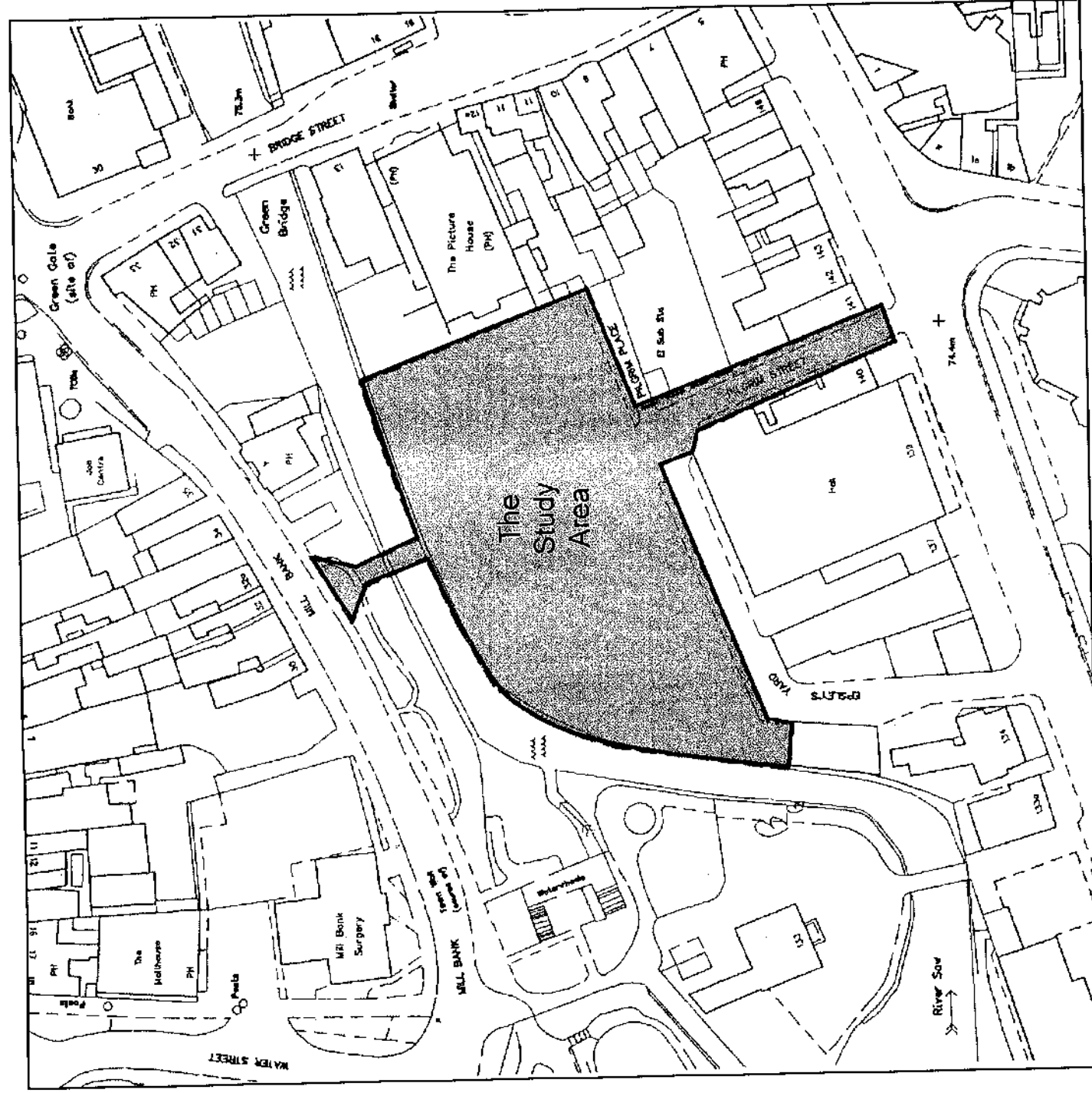


Fig. 2

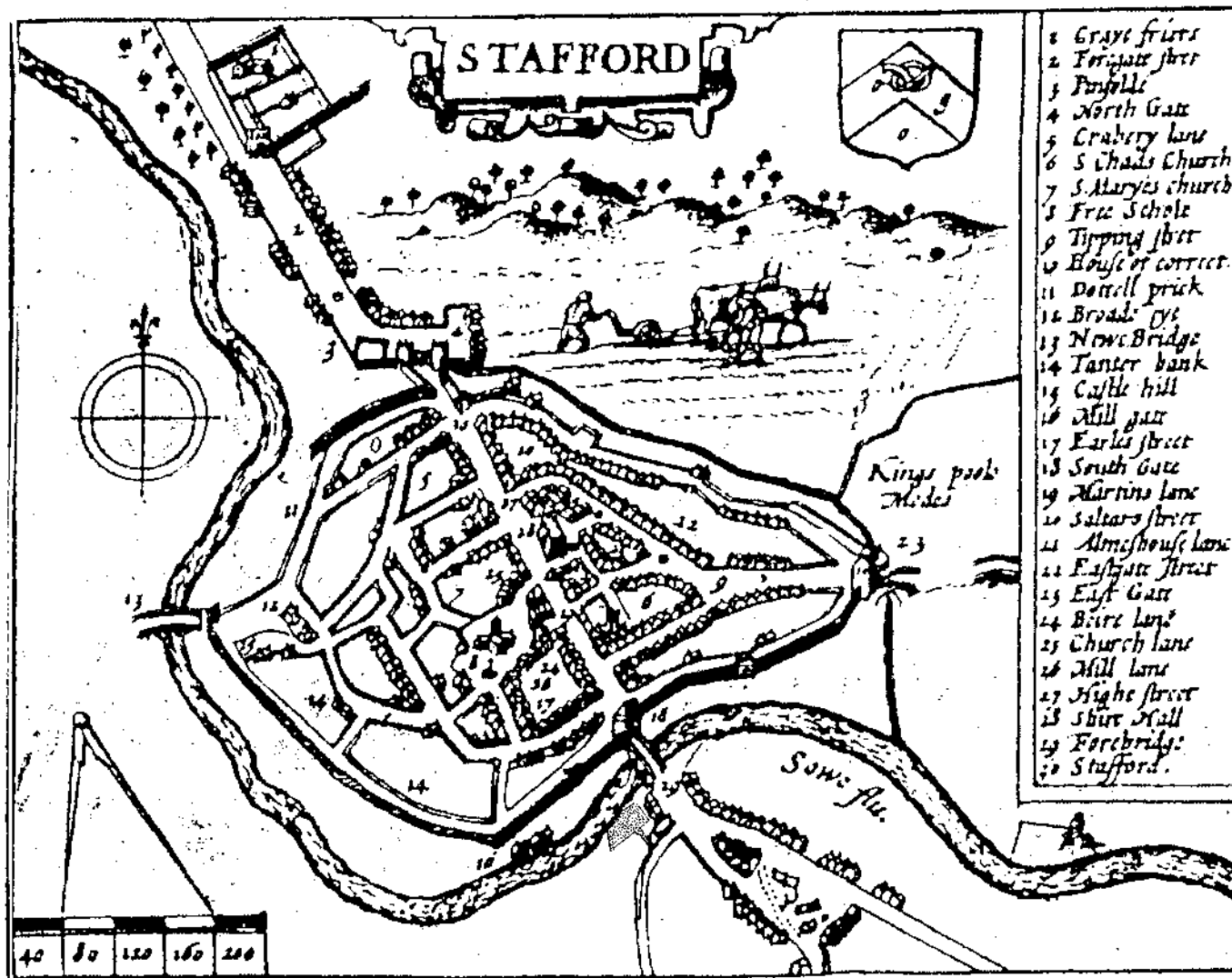


Fig.3 (1610)

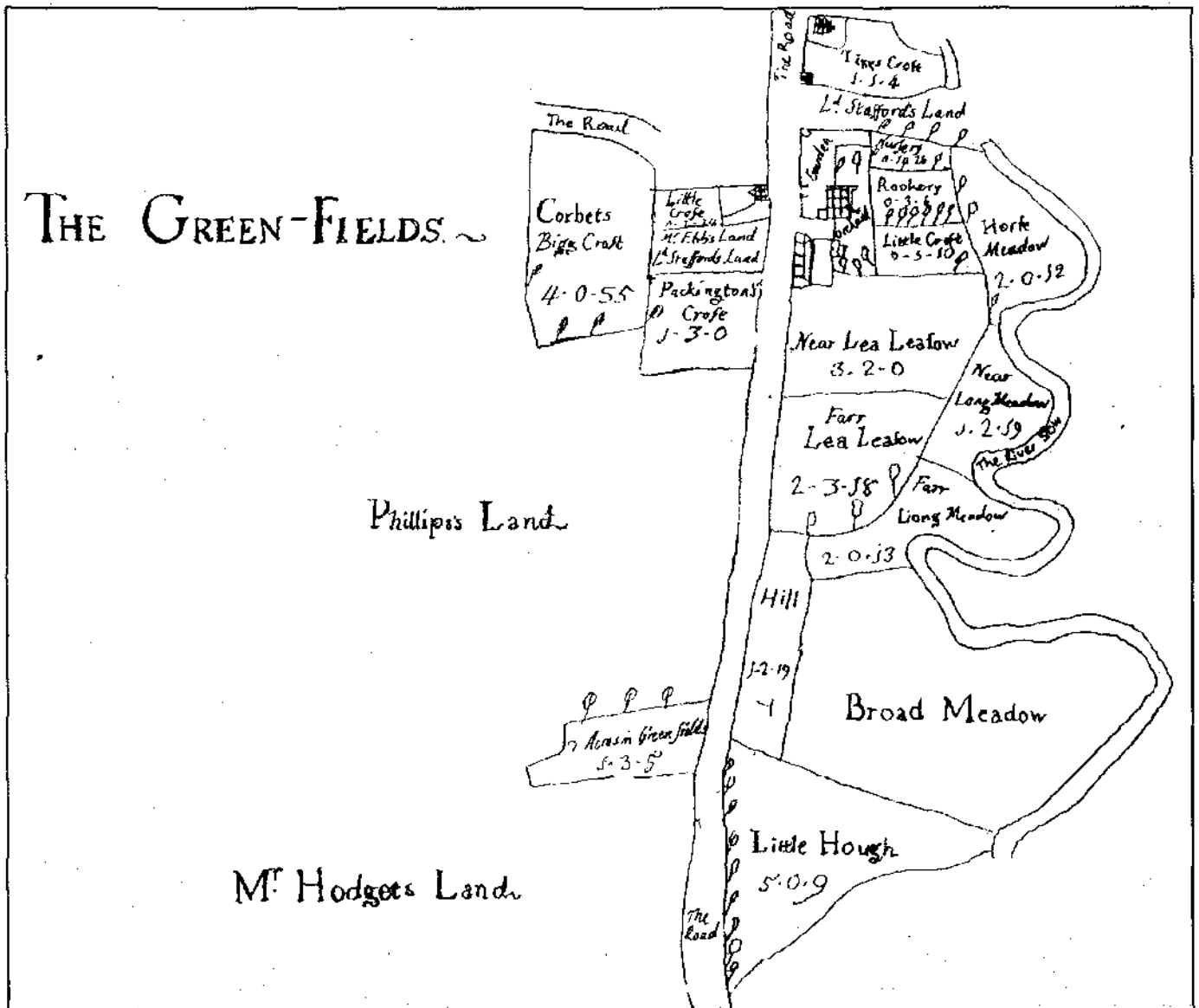


Fig.4 (1732)

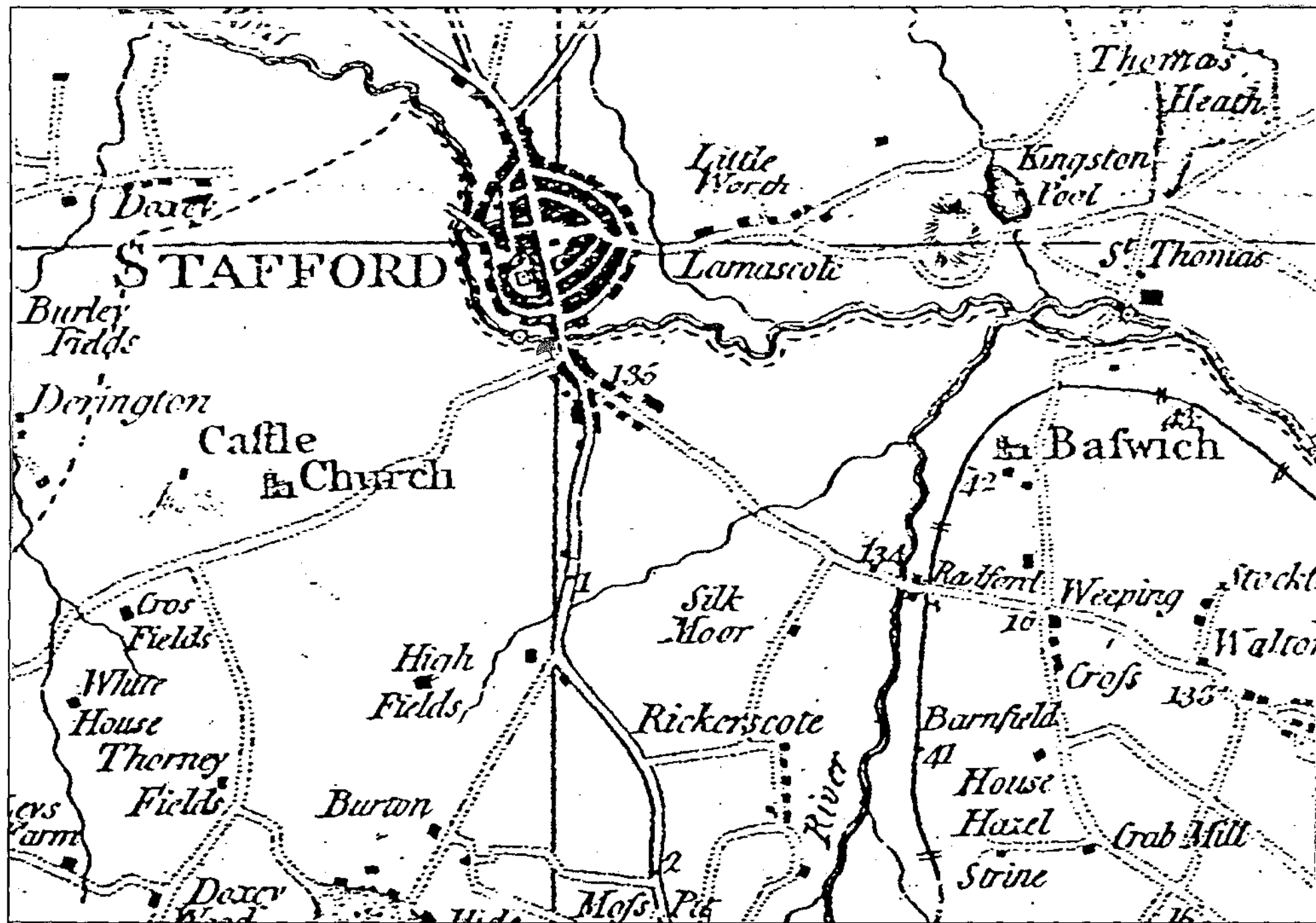


Fig.5 (1775)

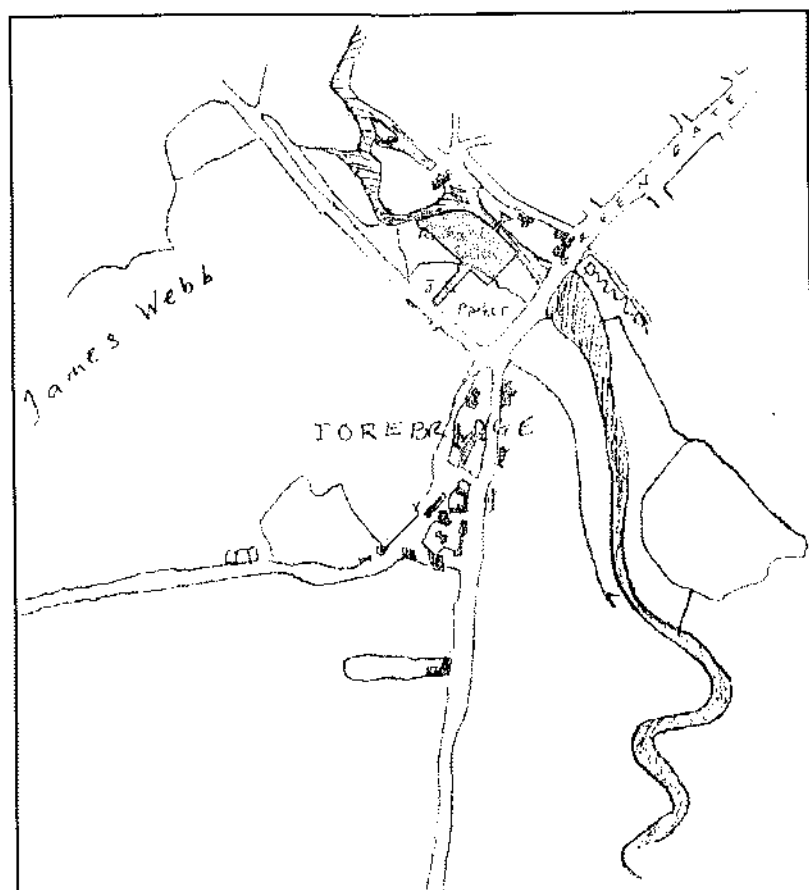


Fig.6 (c.1800)

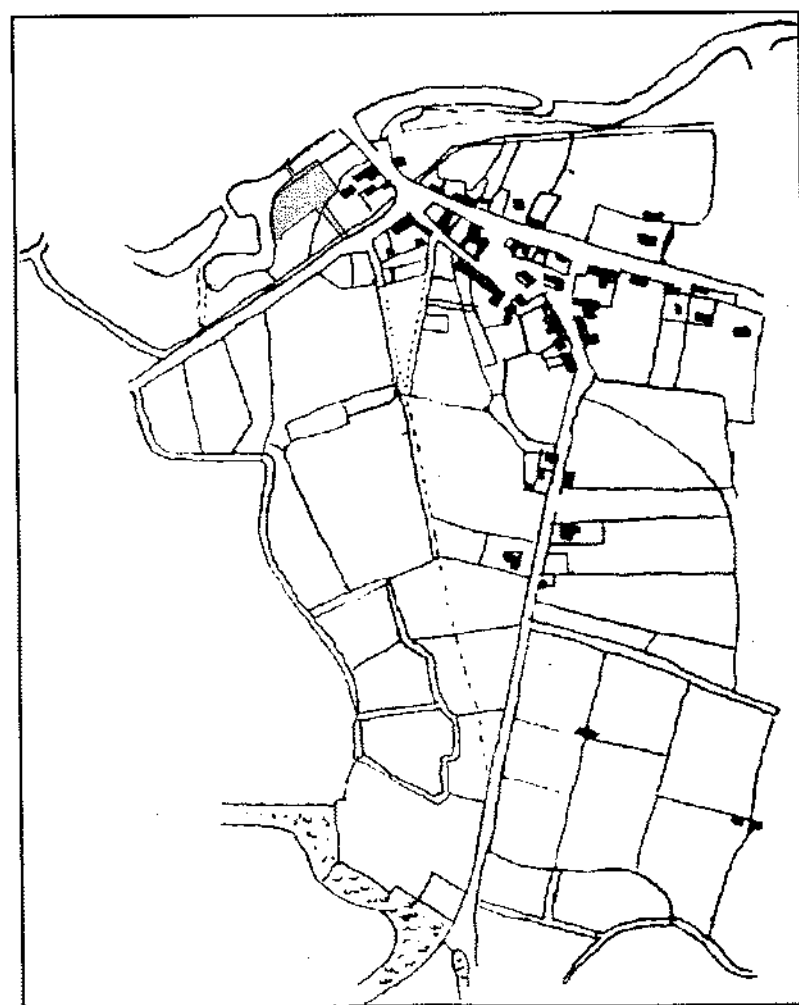


Fig.7 (1830)

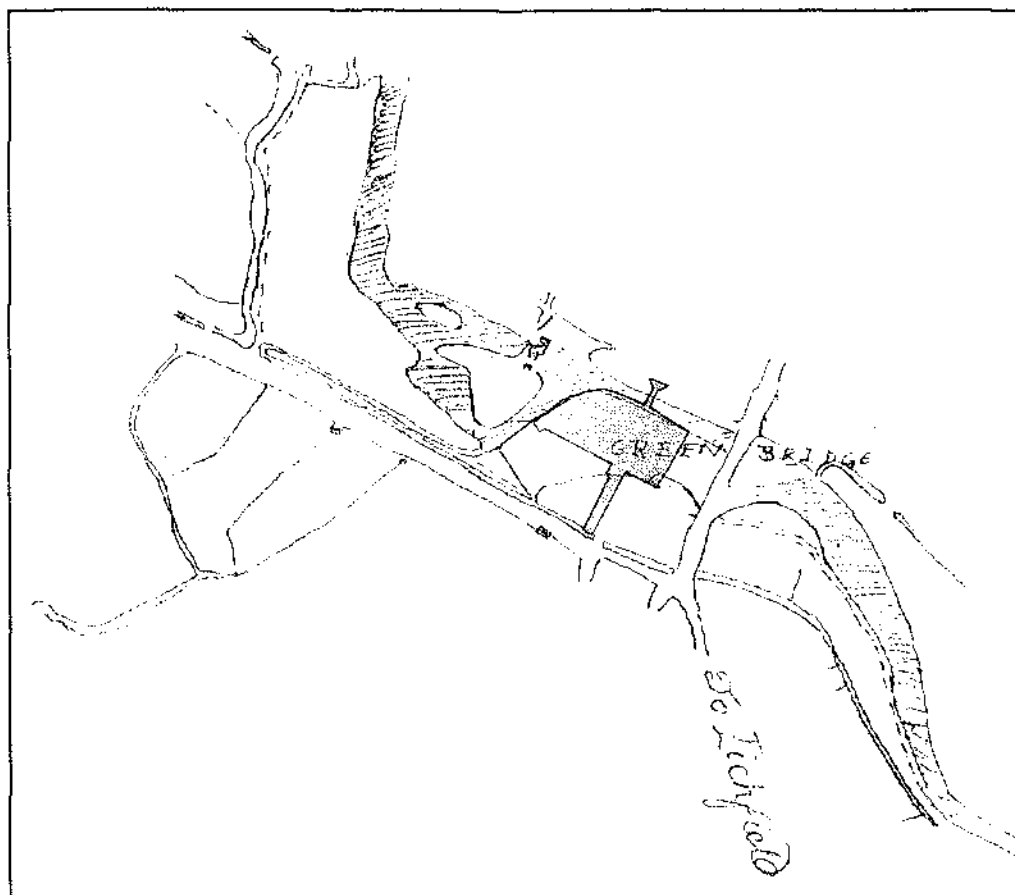


Fig.8 (19th c.)

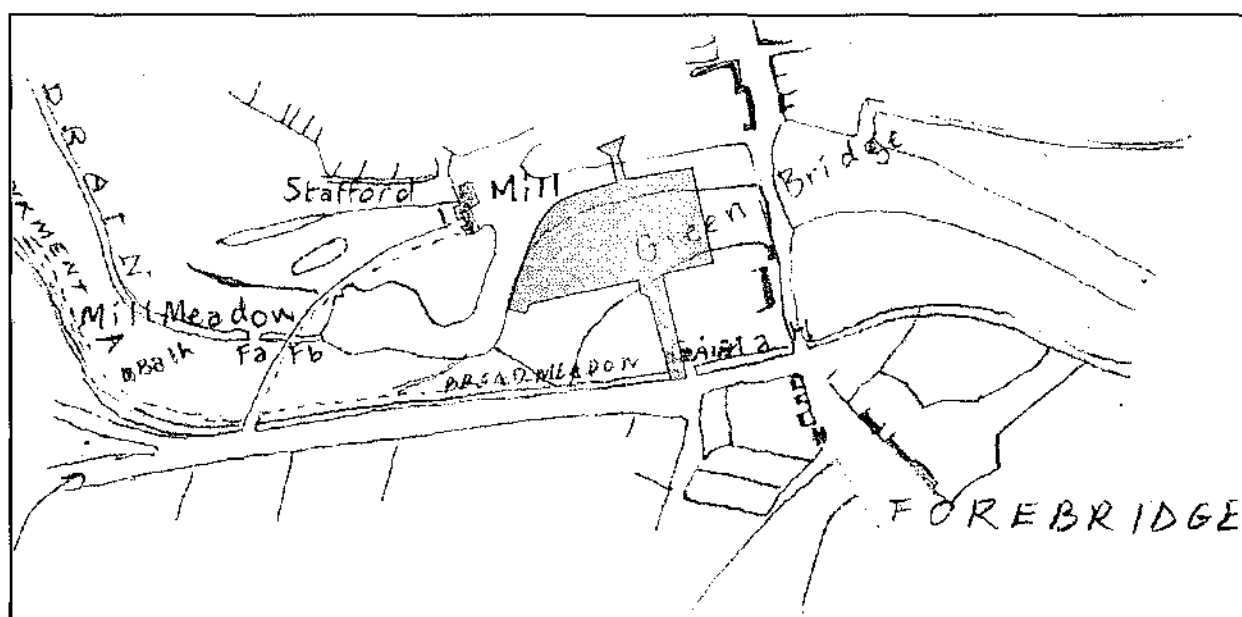


Fig.9 (1851)

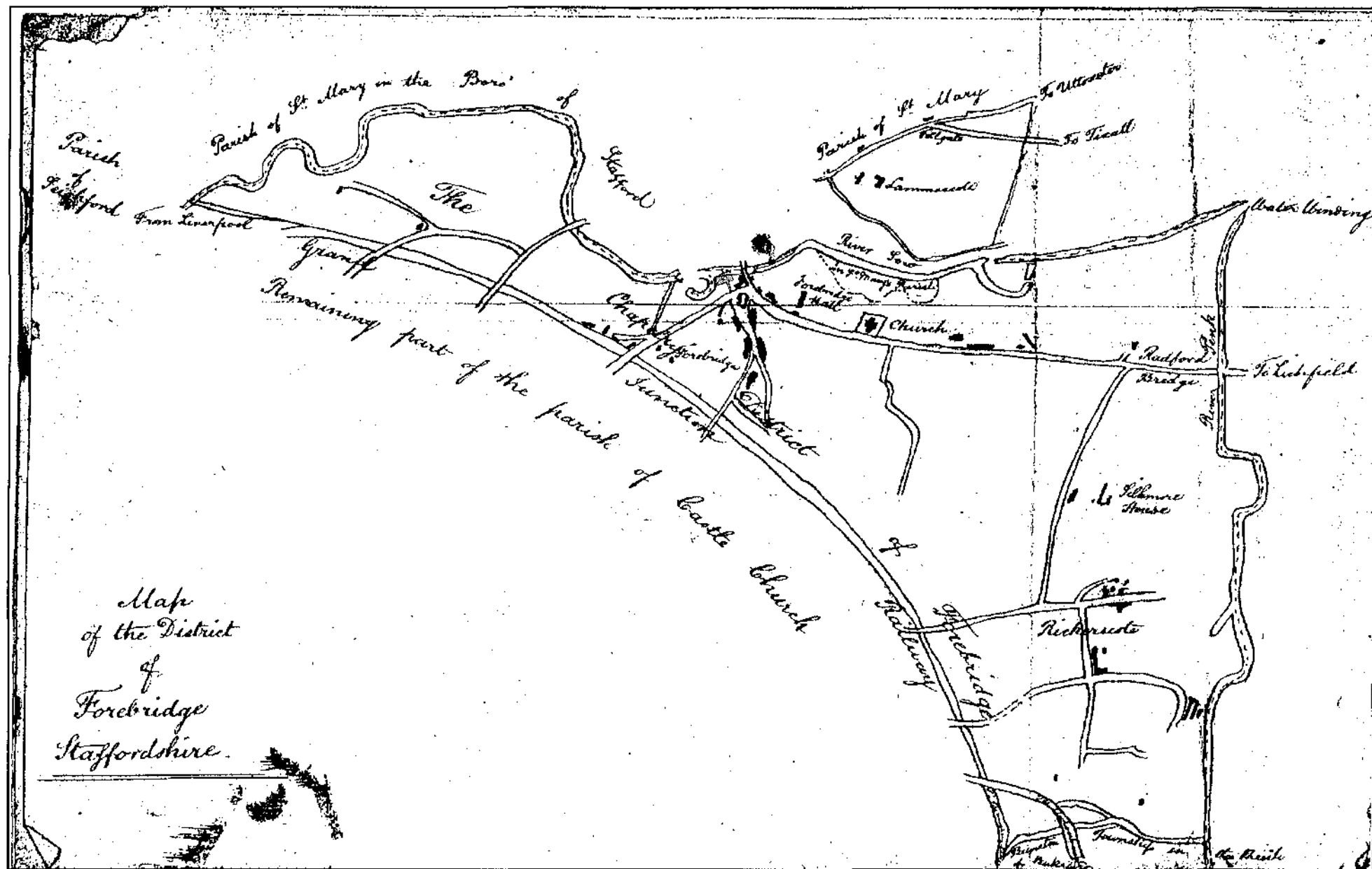


Fig.10 (1875)

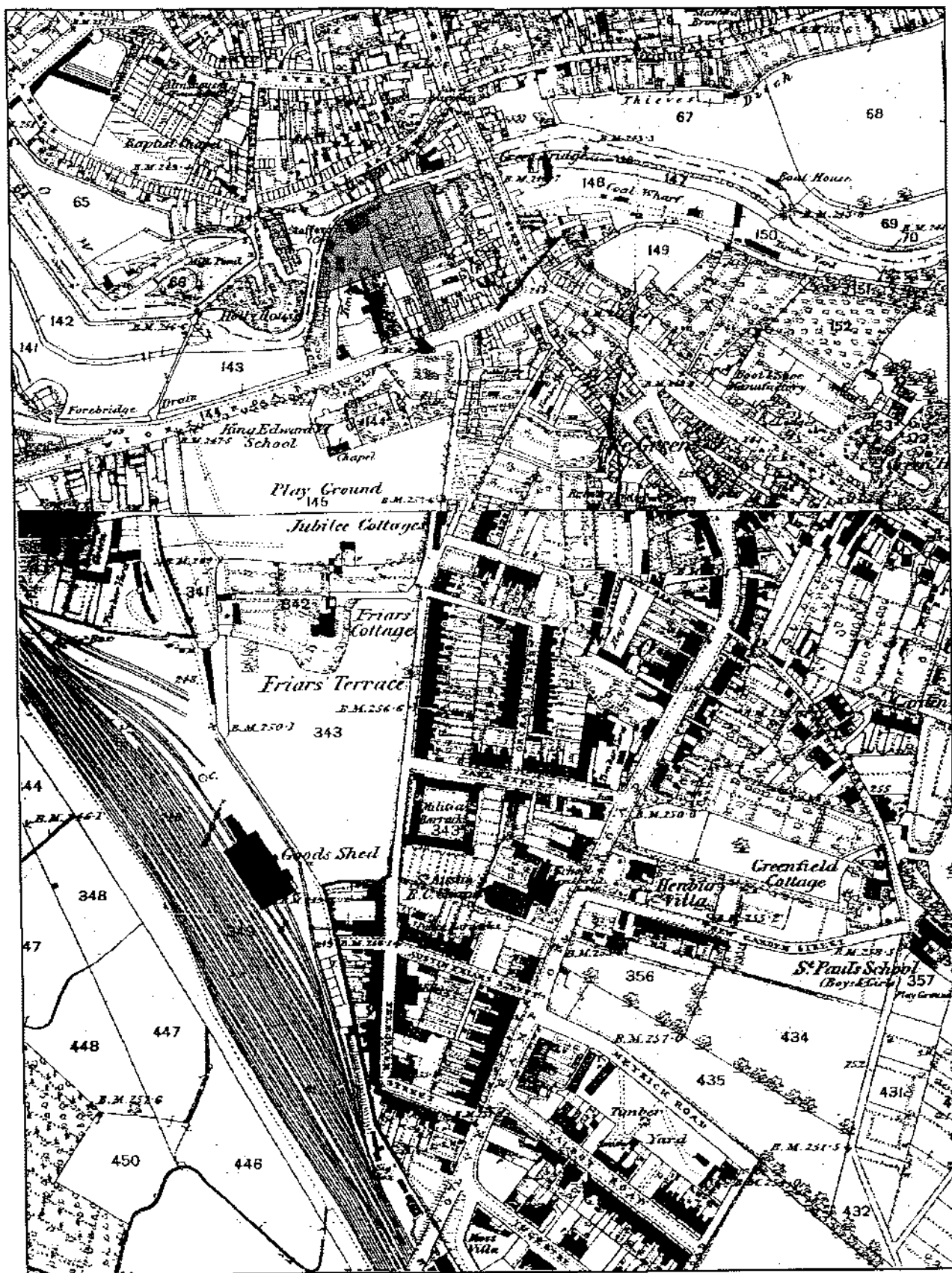


Fig.11 (1882)

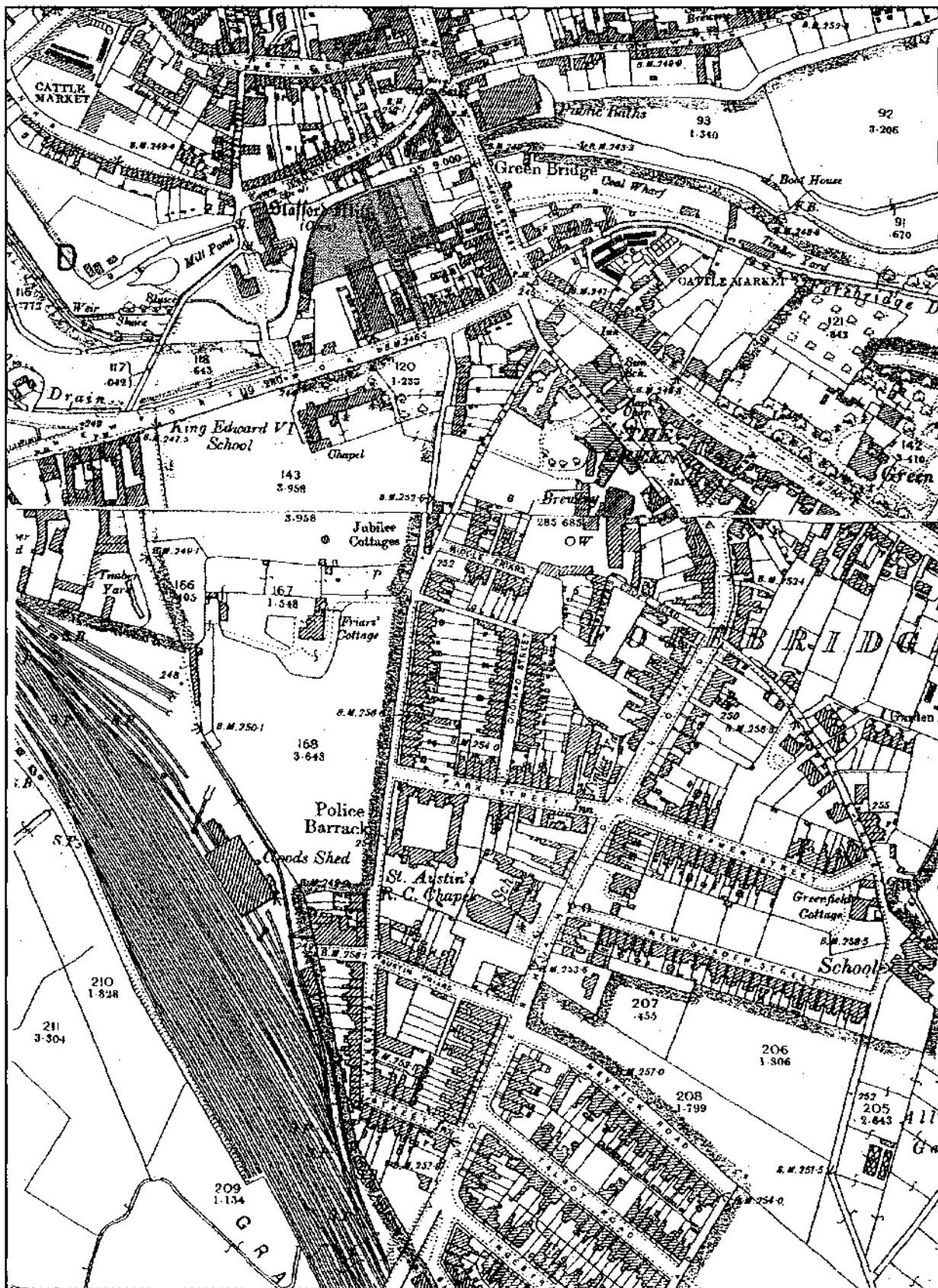


Fig.12 (1902)

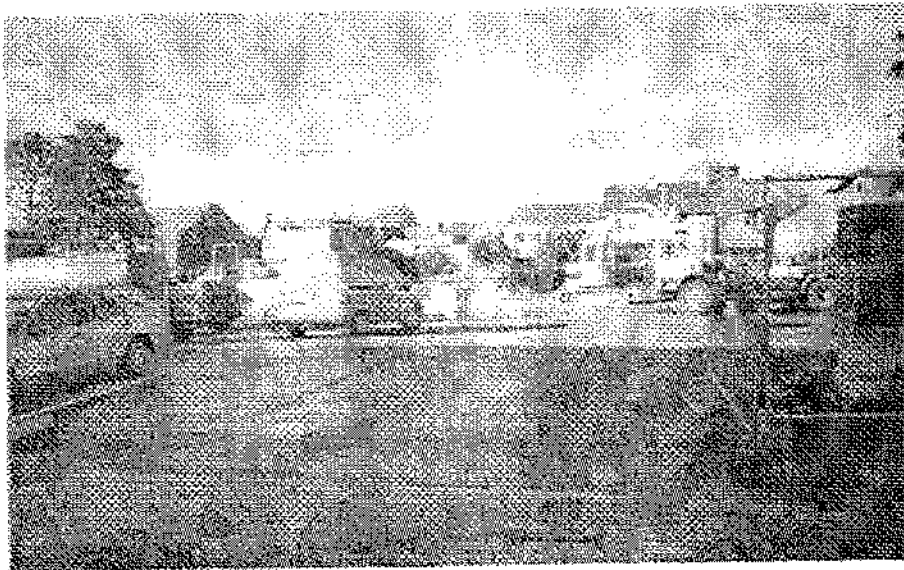


Plate 1

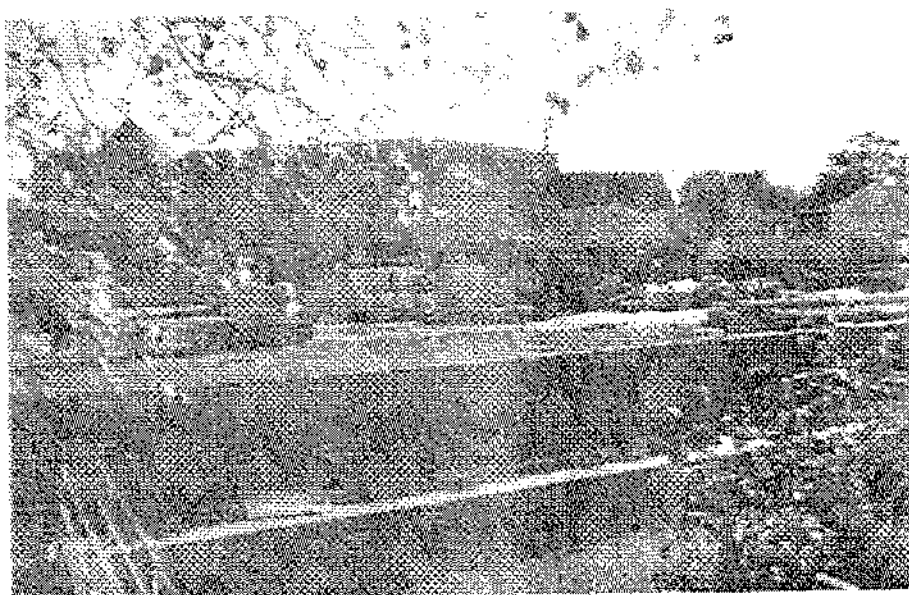


Plate 2



Plate 3